

For Tzvia

Dear Chavraya,

Pride and sadness came to me this week as two companions hand in hand. Our sixteen-year old daughter, Tzvia, wrote an article for *Sh'ma* magazine, which her mother edits. She wrote in supportive response to a feature article that critiques the single voice through which Israel is often taught in Jewish schools. Having just spent three months studying in Israel, there is freshness and excitement in her words. Her love of Israel is clear, even as she asks that more voice be given to the multiplicity of opinions and to the varied ways of supporting Israel. She makes an articulate case that as students mature, their connection to Israel will be strengthened if they have been given the opportunity and helped to wrestle with the hard issues. "Sadly," she says, "I wonder if school administrators and teachers think that Jewish high school students cannot understand the complex situation in Israel. Everything has multiple viewpoints...." Such is the source of my pride.

And now the source of sadness... In the course of verifying information, a copy of the article was sent to her school in Israel. The response startled Tzvia. While couched in an effort to separate a critique of her opinions from her as a person, the tone of pique was clear, "I must say that I am disappointed in what Tzvia wrote." As Tzvia's father, I am disappointed in an adult, a Jewish educator, who, regardless of personal opinion, could not acknowledge the courage and sincerity of a young person's willingness to question. While her opinion has not been embraced, Tzvia has received more support in her school locally for expressing her own opinion toward facilitating discussion.

With tears of pride and sadness, I welcomed Tzvia into the world of controversy engendered for the sake of seeking truth. I did not expect the *moshiach* to come in the blink of an eye before my youngest child reached adulthood, but I realized this week that I had nurtured an unconscious and naïve hope that the world might somehow have become gentler in time for her coming of age.

Long ago, through this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Yitro*, the rabbis affirmed that panoply of voices that Tzvia calls to be heard. Acknowledging many ways of hearing God's voice, and thereby of finding one's own, the rabbis boldly rooted a sacred spectrum of diversity at no more holy and exalted moment than the revelation at Sinai. Weaving *midrash* around the first words of the Ten Commandments, *I am God your God*, the rabbis look to Psalm 29, to words that we sing every Shabbos when returning the Torah to the ark, *Kol Hashem bako'ach/God's voice is in the strength*. There is an immediate question, why doesn't the verse say *the voice of God is in God's strength*? An answer is given, when God's voice went forth at Sinai, it was heard by each person according to her or his own unique strength, *bako'ach shel kol echad v'echad/in the strength of each and every person*.

God is heard in many ways and affirmed through many voices. Our challenge is to hear each other's way of hearing and to honor every voice.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor